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SUBJECT: SYRIA NATIONAL PLAN FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA

REF: A) SECSTATE 209622 B) DAMASCUS 6129

1. Following is a translation of the SARG's national contingency plan for avian influenza, dated October 11, 2005, which was adopted by the Council of Ministers (including the Ministers of Transport, Local Administration and Environment, Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Interior, Economy and Trade, Health, and the Director General of Customs).

Begin text:

National Emergency Plan Concerning Avian Influenza

a. Definition of the disease:

Avian influenza is a very contagious viral disease that affects different kinds of birds (e.g. chickens, turkeys, pigeons, wild birds, ducks). If contracted, characteristics of the disease include blood poisoning and a high mortality rate that may reach 100 percent. Avian influenza is a common disease that can be transmitted to humans and cause death.

b. Cause of the disease:

There are two strains of the flu virus (strain A and strain B), which are very contagious. The incubation period of the viruses is from 3 to 5 days. In poultry, tests are needed to differentiate between avian influenza and other diseases such as avian cholera, Newcastle disease, and other respiratory illnesses such as larynx infections.

c. Historical background about avian influenza and its relation with the humankind:

Strain A of the flu virus has had three mutations in the structure of the superficial antigen "H," that have caused international epidemics that led to high mortality rates in industrial countries. The phases of the mutations can be summarized as follows:

- The Spanish flu in 1918-1919 that caused the death of more than 41 million people;
- The Asian flu that appeared in 1957 (renamed as the Hong Kong Flu in 1968) that caused many mortalities;
- From 1997-2003, a limited number of illnesses have been caused by a new strain A (called H5N1), which appeared in Hong Kong and has been shown to be directly transmitted from birds to people;
- The disease has been reported in North and South America, Africa, Europe, the U.K., and recently in southeast Asia. It has not yet been reported in Syria.

d. The national policy:

The national policy contains a number of health-related and administrative measures that aim to:

- Prevent the entry of contagious diseases into Syria, though no cases have yet been reported;
- Monitor the development of avian influenza throughout the world and all scientific updates related to it;
- Increase awareness among those employed in poultry production through seminars and technical brochures;
- Take all necessary technical and health-related measures to contend with contagious diseases reported in poultry farms throughout the country and minimize economic losses as much as possible.

e. These goals may be achieved by the central emergency committee. This committee includes:

- Deputy Minister of Agriculture
- Director of the Animal Health Department [Ministry of Agriculture]
- Representative of the General Peasants Union
- Representative of the Veterinarians Syndicate
- Representative from the Ministry of Health
- Representative from the College of Veterinary Medicine [Al Baath University]
- Director of the Department of Contagious Diseases [Ministry of Health]
- Director of the Department of Poultry [Ministry of Agriculture]
- Director of Department of Quarantines [Ministry of Agriculture]

f. Mission of the committee:

- Suggest appropriate technical decision to prevent the spread of disease in the country;
- Follow up on imposed quarantines (especially those in the border regions), and monitor compliance with health and safety measures related to the poultry sector and poultry production;
- Monitor the international health situation, especially regarding the development of avian influenza, through international organizations and committees (eg. WHO, FAO, and OIE);
- Monitor the health of Syrian poultry;
- Cooperate, coordinate, and exchange data with all parties concerned about avian influenza;
- Form avian influenza committees in each governorate;
- Receive technical reports from the governorate committees if the existence of a contagious disease among poultry (particularly if symptoms include respiratory problems) is suspected, and study the technical reports;
- Take all necessary health-related and administrative steps in case of an outbreak of the disease in the country;
- Explore all options for compensating farmers if there is an outbreak of the disease;

g. Formation of governorate committees:

These are technical committees headed by the Director of the Animal Health Department in each governorate, and members include three to five veterinarians. The committees will achieve the following:

- Monitor the health of poultry in each governorate and communicate through all means possible with employees in poultry production;
- Prepare technical reports that include information on poultry health in the governorate, which are due to the central emergency committee three days after the formation of the governorate committee;
- Gather samples from poultry suspected of having the disease and send them to the central laboratory of the Animal Health Department, which will provide lab results of influenza strains and confirmation of any outbreaks;
- Provide immediate information on suspected cases of the contagious disease via a faxed urgent report to the central emergency committee in the Animal Health Department;
- Increase awareness among poultry workers of the dangers of the disease and the economic losses it can cause through the distribution of technical brochures and scientific seminars;
- Continually coordinate with the central emergency committee in the Animal Health Department.

h. Utilizing experts and consultants:

Veterinarians specializing in poultry diseases at the College of Veterinary Medicine will be consulted, as will all scientific groups and researchers, so that they can study all measures taken by the central emergency committee. National and foreign experts may also be consulted, if necessary.

i. Current preventive measures taken to prevent the spread of avian influenza in the country:

Since the beginning of the spread of avian flu in a number of countries, the Animal Health Department in the Ministry of Agriculture has taken some preventive measures such as:

- Banning the import of all poultry and poultry products from countries where an outbreak of avian influenza has been reported, with the recommendation to ban the import of all poultry and poultry products from all countries for two months as a preventive measure;
- Informing the Quarantines Department of the necessity of enforcing all health-related and administrative measures, especially at the borders, and prohibiting the entry of any kind of domesticated, wild, or pet bird into the country;
- Preparing technical brochures about avian influenza with scientific references and information on how the disease affects birds and humans;
- Equipping the laboratory of poultry diseases with all necessary equipment for disease diagnosis;
- Providing daily updates on the international health situation;
- Monitoring local poultry health;
- Quarantining any poultry farm on which birds have exhibited respiratory problems, and gathering samples from such farms for clinical diagnosis;
- Monitoring the disease by gathering serum samples from various governorates and testing them for disease.

j. Technical and administrative measures that should be taken in case of an outbreak:

- In cooperation with all concerned parties and administrative authorities, impose a strict quarantine in

the district in which a confirmed case has been reported and take all necessary steps to contain the disease to this area;

- Ban the use and consumption of all poultry products in an area infected with avian influenza;
- Culling and burning or burial of all poultry in an infected area, taking into account all necessary hygienic measures;
- Banning poultry production in an infected region for no less than one month;
- Confirming the strain of the disease through laboratory tests and studying all possible options to keep other poultry healthy;
- Banning the transfer of all live birds between governorates to limit the spread of the disease.

End text.

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